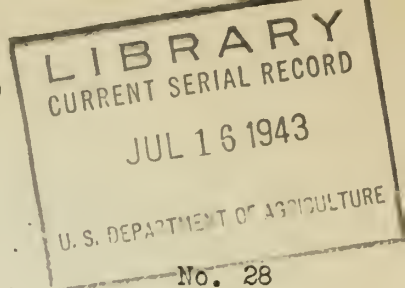


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Subject: Summary of Kentucky study on under employed farm workers

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Farm people in regions where they are underemployed and on farms too small to keep them productively busy full time, make up one of the important potential sources of workers badly needed in the more-productive farming areas.

The necessity for keeping all possible labor fully employed for all-out production in wartime has led the Department and a number of States to study the extent of farm underemployment in a number of areas, particularly in the Appalachian and Ozark Mountain regions. One such study, recently made in eastern Kentucky, is summarized here for any light it can throw on availability of farm labor.

Pressure of Population

Eastern Kentucky has long been recognized as an area where "a decrease in the pressure of population appears to be essential to the solution of major economic problems." In fact, during the depression years, when the movement from farms to cities virtually stopped and population accumulated, it was recommended that families on the rougher, poorer lands develop their limited land resources "until opportunities for resettlement on suitable agricultural land become available."

The 1940 census indicated that there was a large supply of labor available in that region for employment elsewhere, but it was also known that there subsequently had been a heavy out-migration from low-income rural areas because of increased job opportunities brought about by the defense and then the war programs.

Accordingly, it was decided to find out how many rural workers actually were available for employment in eastern Kentucky. To that end, a field survey was made in November and December 1942 by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station. The results of that survey have recently been published by the BAE in an 82-page report titled "Manpower for War Work, Eastern Kentucky."

The report, written by Olaf F. Larson and James C. Downing, states that the survey found more rural workers in the 33 eastern Kentucky counties available for employment than the earlier estimates had indicated.

Farm People Leave Area

Although the departure of farm people from this area between April 1, 1940 and December 1, 1942, was greater than the gain during the previous decade by 27 percent, there was a low estimate of 63,000 available workers in the area as of December 1, 1942, and a high estimate of 98,000. The low estimate includes 28,000 men who are heads of families, 19,000 other men, and 16,000 women who are neither wives nor heads of households. These are persons aged 15 to 59, not now having a war job, not productively engaged on their own farms, and not having any serious handicaps to prevent them from changing work. The high estimate of 98,000 available workers also includes housewives without children under 10 years of age and some others--especially youths of 15 and over who are normally in school part of the year--who are not part of the low estimate.

An analysis of 1942 farm business records obtained from 359 eastern Kentucky families led the men who conducted the survey to conclude that "the war contribution of eastern Kentucky's farm population has been largely in terms of workers and fighters rather than food." Among the 359 families, 80 percent had less than 8 war units, the minimum production of essential war foods required to make a farm operator or worker eligible for deferment by Selective Service. These families averaged 3.5 war units. Twelve percent had between 8 and 11.9 war units, averaging 9.5, while only 8 percent had 12 or more war units and averaged slightly over 14. Farm families with less than 8 war units had an average annual net cash farm income of only \$41 in 1942.

More Could Leave

"There seems little doubt," the report asserts, "that most eastern Kentucky farm families considered as available for other employment could substantially raise their level of living and contribute more to the war effort by moving to more productive employment." It adds: "Even if all the families whose heads were available for war work were to move, it is estimated that Kentucky's annual production of butterfat would diminish by less than half of 1 percent, of cattle and calves by not more than 8 percent, and of poultry by less than 6 percent."

Despite the low productivity in the area, the men who conducted the survey found several barriers hindering those people from changing jobs and work locations, either within or outside of the area. Among them "is the fact that one in three of the married men would have to make arrangements for disposition of the land he owns and farms. Over half have families of five or more persons, thus facing special problems, if they move, of paying transportation costs and procuring housing. About 20,000 of the 28,000 married men have either land or large families or both to restrict their ease of movement. Lack of experience with more complicated farming equipment and with large-scale farming operations is general, as is a lack of formal education beyond the elementary school."

Willing to Take War Jobs

The report adds, however, that "although the workers face rather drastic adjustments if they enter agriculture elsewhere or industry, the majority are young and many indicated a willingness to take a war job. Attitudes of these potential workers toward their present way of life and toward making a change, as well as public policies and programs, will influence how many do enter more productive employment."

Considering the question of how many of these families would be willing to do agricultural work in more productive farming areas, Larson and Downing declare that "although there are many persons who might work seasonally on farms outside of eastern Kentucky, the majority of workers available on a year-around basis appear to be more interested in industrial than in agricultural work. One reason for this attitude is the loss of status involved in becoming a farm laborer; another is the difference between agriculture and industry in wages and hours of work. Most of the men who might be available as year-around farm hands will have families."

Farm Combination Limited

The men who conducted the survey found the opportunities for widespread combination of farms, even in the event of the departure of families with available workers, were rather limited. The limitations, they say, arise partly out of the restricted acreages of creek bottom-land, the fact that unused tracts may be relatively inaccessible to other operated farms, and the high labor requirements for crops because of rugged topography and small, irregular fields.

As a result of the out-migration that has already taken place, the report states, "the composition of the population has been altered by decreasing the proportion of workers, increasing the proportion of young and aged dependents, and decreasing the ratio of men to women." If the present age and sex distribution continues long, Larson and Downing believe, "it is likely to be reflected in higher rates of social dependency, higher illness and death rates, and lower birth rates."

"For fuller utilization of manpower in eastern Kentucky available for war work," the report makes 15 recommendations, among which are these:

Making job placement services accessible to all farm people who are interested in finding other employment would increase the proportion of the available workers who would enter war jobs.

Seasonal Workers Available

The recruitment and placement of seasonal workers for various areas of agricultural labor demand should be continued and expanded among farm families in the region.

The recruitment and placement of year-round agricultural workers for other areas offers some possibilities, especially if combined with a training program, and if measures are taken to make farm work as attractive as industrial work.

Vocational training for potential workers for agriculture and industry should be continued and expanded.

Potential farm workers should be apprised in advance of the conditions of their prospective employment, including wages and perquisites, the kind and amount of work to be required, and the arrangements for the relocation of the family.

Families who can increase their war production by moving should be assisted with the costs of moving, if necessary.

Efforts should be made to provide adequate housing at a reasonable rent at the scene of employment.

To insure the stable adjustment of workers, provision should be made for an orientation and training period to assist in the adjustment to new ways of working and living which go with entering a war job in other areas.

Efforts to assist farm people who move from eastern Kentucky into war work should include consideration of the long-time welfare of the population in the area.